

STORIES OF IMPACT AND RESILIENCE

FROM PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

Sharing lived experiences gives planners and policy makers valuable insights into the needs of those impacted by their decisions.

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

I was studying computing and it at the Santo António Metinaro senior high school where I lived in a dormitory with other students. I have a vision impairment and my parents died when I was younger. My brothers and sisters looked after me, they would send money to me via the bus drivers. I went to school every day. After class, my friends and I would plant vegetables and build fences for the school. I also volunteered with a mission for people with disability, we would advocate for inclusion of people with disability to local authorities and communities. I felt very proud to have the chance to share my experience with young people, to help them be more inclusive of people with disability. People say that women cannot do anything but I felt very strong, and I studied hard to achieve my goals.

DURING THE PANDEMIC

I felt sad and scared, because many lives had been taken by the virus in many countries. In Timor Leste the roads were shut, public transport stopped, schools closed and people were told to isolate at home. There was little food or money to respond to everyday needs. My family could not send money because the buses were stopped. I stayed in the school dormitory. I was supported by local organisations who provided rice, cooking oil, and noodles. We also had vegetables from the garden. During the pandemic, the government

MARIANA G, TIMOR-LESTE



initiated online learning. This was difficult for me since I did not have money to buy a smartphone to attend the school subjects that were taught online. I tried many ways, and my friends shared their smartphones, but still I faced difficulties - I could listen when teachers spoke, but I could not see the phone screen. It would have been easier if I could use braille, or other ways to access the learning materials. I am pleased to say that I succeeded in completing my studies anyway.

AFTER THE PANDEMIC

I completed a six-month English course in Aileu municipality. Now I am volunteering with the Ahisaun Foundation. I cannot study at the university because my family can't afford the fees. I hope that I will be able to get a government scholarship to continue my studies.

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